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(54) Automatic image layout method and system

(57) A method for automatically generating templates to define how different images should be arranged on a page. Through the application of standard optimization techniques with cost functions tuned to the needs of SmartPlaten technology, a collection of digital

images are arranged on contact sheet-like templates whereon each image is scaled and positioned to minimize the amount of white space on the page. Resulting images are as large as possible, yet fit within a pre-designated page area.

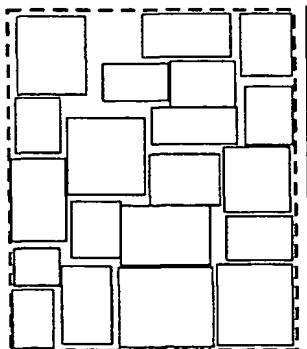


FIG. 1

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Description

Field of the Invention

[0001] This invention is generally related to layout techniques for digital images and, more particularly, to an automatic image layout technique which allows a collection of digital images to be formatted in a single contact sheet-like layout for rapid viewing and cataloging.

Background of the Invention

[0002] Computer based document handling systems are generally divided into four broad categories: text editors and word processing systems; formatters; syntax directed editors; and specialized tools. Most systems have features from more than one of these four broad categories in addition to any image processing necessary for editing images. An image processor reads an image of a document using an image input unit, stores it in a memory in the form of image data, and subjects the stored image data to editing operations such as addition and deletion. As one of the editing operations, part of the read document is electronically cut and pasted to a predetermined place in another document. In such an electronic cutting and pasting operation, the document image to be cut and the destination document image are displayed either on a single display unit or on separate display units, and a cutting image portion in the document to be cut and a pasting place in the pasting (destination) document are similarly specified by a mouse, for example. In the related art image processor, the cutting image portion and the pasting place are specified by the operator by selecting appropriate positions while looking at the screen. For this reason, it is not possible to cut or paste figures precisely. Particularly, shifts in position are noticeable when the same patterns must be juxtaposed. US Patent No. 5,224,181 to Tsutsumi entitled "image processor" and US Patent No. 5,202,670 to Oha entitled "image Processing Apparatus" both discuss image processing generally. For documents in which presentational considerations are important, the documents must be submitted to a formatter for preparation prior to presentation. Formatters are non-interactive tools that process a document to produce either a display independent or a device dependent layout specification. Documents are submitted to formatters in the form of descriptions on file and they carry out the processing and return the overall results after a certain period of time. High-level formatters work on the basis of a logical description of the document. The user is not required to specify the presentation details desired. The user deals with the logical organization of the document, i.e., the different types of elements that appear in the document, such as, for example, section, paragraph, heading, summary, etc. The formatter handles the layout presentation of these elements. Low-level formatters make it possible to include commands within the

document description to enable changes in other characteristics of the document, such as, for example, font, spacing, margins and justification. US Patent No. 5,438,512 to Mantha et al. entitled "Method and apparatus for specifying layout processing of structured documents" is directed to high-level formatters. Mantha discloses a method and apparatus for specifying layout processing of logically structured documents in computer document handling systems. The Mantha method and apparatus allow the specification of the generic logical structure of the structured document in terms of relational attribute grammars.

[0003] Most interactive systems allow the user to see the layout of a document as it is being prepared. These interactive systems also separate the logical structure of the documents from the specification of the presentation details. Typically, interactive systems as well as high-level formatters, use a grammatical notation to describe the logical structure of documents. These logical structures are mostly hierarchical in nature and tree structures are used to represent them.

[0004] The need for document processing devices which can generate a layout structure of a document by applying a template (i.e., rules for layout) to a logical structure of the document are apparent with the wide use of microprocessors to process and properly render electronically created or digitally scanned documents, or images as more specifically referred to at times. In general, both of the logical development and the layout of an actual output document are important factors of the document. However, the layout is not necessarily important in the process of producing a document. For example, although the layout is necessary once the contents of a document are determined, in some cases the layout is not considered in the initial stage of document production where the logical development is not clear yet. Furthermore, different layouts may be required for one logical development in some cases; for instance, when the same document needs to be distributed to a plurality of persons or sections. Recognizing the above distinction, there have been proposed techniques of generating a layout representing such structures called "layout structure" from a structure called "logical structure" which represents the chapter construction of a document. The process of generating a layout structure from a logical structure is called a layout process, and is performed by a program (layout processing program) that is incorporated in document processing systems.

[0005] In order to generate various forms of layout structures from the same logical structure, the operation of a layout processing program needs to be modified. However, in general, a program itself cannot be modified properly by ordinary users because the modification needs expert knowledge. For this reason, there has been employed a technique of altering a program by using parameters such as "page size is A4" and "double column setting" for textual documents. However, according to this technique, the kinds of specifiable param-

eters are limited to ones that are preset in the program. Furthermore, to control the operation of a layout processing program having many functions it is necessary to specify a large number of parameters which precludes ordinary users from using such a program. To solve the above problems, there have been proposed techniques of controlling a layout processing program by using, rather than simple parameters, a data structure representing a layout template. One of those techniques is a "generic layout structure" prescribed in the international standards "ODA" (ISO8613, Information Processing-Text and Office Systems-Office Document Architecture (ODA) and Interchange Format (1989)). The ODA only sets forth data structures for representing document structures and guidelines for their use, and does not describe actual layout processes. However, it is apparent that the following functions are needed to perform layout operations according to the ODA. The layout process having the following functions is hereinafter referred to as "ODA layout process."

- (1) Layout processing function based on a layout template (generic layout structure)
- (2) Layout process selecting function (top-down or bottom-up)
- (3) Reuse of a layout result
- (4) Category-based layout processing function

The functions (mechanisms) (1)-(4) are not necessarily effected individually, but could be combined when desired. Combining the functions can improve the efficiency of the layout process.

[0006] US Patent No. 5,381,523 issued to Hayashi entitled "Document processing device using partial layout templates" discloses partial layout templates that are prepared for respective partial logical structures of a hierarchical logical structure of a document. Each partial layout template expresses rules for producing a layout of the corresponding partial logical structure. A partial layout generator produces a partial layout structure by recursively calling itself or by calling a content layout system while referring to the partial layout template, and pours the generated partial layout structure into a lowest-rank frame. A layout of the entire logical structure is produced by sequentially performing the partial layout operations. Hayashi also only relates to a document processing device which can generate a layout structure of a single document by applying a template (i.e., rules for layout) to a logical structure of the single document.

[0007] With the growing interest in digital photography and the necessity to lay out and view several digital images as a document, a need still exists for a document/image structuring process which would allow a microprocessor to organize the layout of several images on a sheet-like medium. Needed is a technology that enables a user to gang scan (several images on the scanner platen at once) many images and automatically locate each image, crop them, and correct any rotation errors

associated with each image. Resulting images can then be stored individually or as a structured image with a user-defined or simple row-column layout which can be created. A detailed description of Structured Images is provided in US-A 5,485,568 issued to Venable et al. on January 16, 1996, entitled "Structured Image (SI) format for describing complex color raster images."

[0008] There is a need for technology that will automatically generate the digital equivalent of a photographers *contact* print sheet in which the segmented images will be scaled and distributed on a resulting page such that each image is scaled as large as possible wherein there is a minimum of white space remaining on the rendered page.

[0009] As a first constraint to adequately addressing such a need, all images must be scaled by the same amount, i.e., the relative size of each segmented image stays the same. A second constraint should be in forming the equivalent of a bounding box with minimum white space (space uncovered by an rectangle). Once a solution to the above constraints are found, many images may be scaled by the appropriate amount to make a bounding box the same size as the printable area of paper. It is a feature of the present invention to effectively address the constraints in order to accomplish the desired results described above.

[0010] Other advantages and salient features of the invention will become apparent from the detailed description which, taken in conjunction with the drawings, disclose the preferred embodiments of the invention.

Summary of the Invention

[0011] Disclosed is the technology that enables a user to "gang scan" (to scan several images on the scanner platen at once) many images and automatically locate each image, crop them, and correct any rotation errors associated with each image. Resulting images can be stored individually or as a structured image with a user-defined or simple row-column layout which can be automatically created with a microprocessor based system. The invention enables the system to automatically generate the digital equivalent of a photographers *contact* print sheet onto which the segmented images will be scaled and distributed such that each image on the resulting page is scaled as large as possible and wherein there is a minimum of white space remaining on the rendered page. Furthermore, the images are scaled by the same amount, i.e., the relative size of each segmented image stays the same. The optimum spatial distribution of the images, represented by rectangles, are determined under the following guidelines/constraints:

- 1) rectangles (representing each image) do not overlap,
- 2) the bounding box of all rectangles has a minimum area,
- 3) the aspect ratio of the bounding box is a fixed

value R .

[0012] The equivalent of a bounding box with minimum white space is then formed for placement of the images. In terms of the automatic generation of "contact sheets," the segmented images are the rectangles and the aspect ratio of the print area of the paper is R . Once an automatic solution to the above constraints is determined by the microprocessor executed algorithm, the plurality of images (sometimes referred to as "rectangles images" throughout this disclosure) can be scaled by the appropriate amount to make the bounding box the same size as the printable area of the paper.

Description of the Drawings

[0013] The salient features and other aspects of the invention will become apparent from the following detailed description of the invention when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings which are provided for the purpose of describing embodiments of the invention and not for limiting same, in which:

[0014] Figure 1 is an example of the resulting rectangle layout based on an aspect ratio of 1.29. There are 20 original rectangles representing images with dimensions randomly distributed between 20 and 50. The percentage of white space on this "page" is 18%.

[0015] Figure 2 illustrated the same data of Figure 1 processed without the constraint of maintaining the aspect ratio. The percentage white space is 13.2%.

[0016] Figure 3 illustrates an additional constraint specified having the effect of opening the middle of the page and driving rectangles toward the outside edge. The aspect ratio constraint is included here. Percentage white space is 23%.

[0017] Figure 4 illustrates the rectangle layout where the opposite penalty from Figure 3 is set, i.e., rectangles were penalized for being toward the edge. The percentage white space is 28%.

[0018] Figure 5 illustrates a block diagram of the system which is used to implement the invention.

Detailed Description of the Invention

[0019] The solution to this problem is based on combinatorial minimization algorithm *Simulated Annealing* (see Numerical Recipes in C, pp. 343-352). Without going into detail, simulated annealing is an energy minimization algorithm useful in situations where the space of all possible solutions is discreet but very large such that it is impractical to exhaustively search the entire space for the absolute minimum. Simulated annealing is less likely to be trapped in local minima than other minimization algorithms. To use simulated annealing, an energy function that is based on the system constraints must be defined. At random, new configurations of the system are generated and the energy function for each configuration is evaluated. The probability of accepting the

new state is calculated by evaluating the function:

$$Pr = \exp(-(E_{\text{new}} - E_{\text{old}})/kT),$$

where E_{old} is the energy of the previous accepted state, E_{new} is the energy of the new state, T is a control parameter analogous to temperature, and k is a constant. A random number between (0,1) is then obtained using a uniform random number generator. If the random number is less than Pr , the new state is accepted. If E_{new} is less than E_{old} , then Pr is greater than unity and the new state will be accepted. Therefore, new states with lower energies than previous states are always accepted. If E_{new} is greater than E_{old} , the new state will be accepted with a probability given by Pr . This scheme of always taking downhill steps in the energy function and sometimes taking uphill steps is known as a Metropolis algorithm.

[0020] In simulated annealing, the temperature T is periodically lowered according to an annealing schedule. The period between temperature drops is an *epoch*. The amount by which the temperature is lowered is usually a fraction of the current value, e.g., $T_{N+1} = T_N * 0.95$. The process usually begins at an initial temperature T_0 and ends when the temperature reaches a temperature T_{end} or if some other measure of convergence is satisfied. This has the affect of making uphill changes less likely as the algorithm progresses.

[0021] In our application, the positions of all rectangles define the configuration space. To generate new configurations from previous configurations, we define 5 allowed operations. We do not claim these as the only operation possible; these are the ones we have worked with:

- 1) swap the positions of two rectangles
- 2) move a rectangle
- 3) move a rectangle immediately to the right of another rectangle
- 4) move a rectangle immediately to the left of another rectangle
- 5) rotate a rectangle by 90 degrees.

[0022] The algorithm will work using only the Move operation, but the use of additional operations can increase the likelihood of stepping out of local minima. Use the rotate operation only if the intended application allows the rectangles (images) to be rotated. The choice of which operation is applied to generate a new configuration, and which rectangles are to be adjusted, is determined by a uniform random number generator.

[0023] The energy function must be defined such that function is minimized when all of the constraints are met. The energy function we define is:

$$E = \text{whiteSpace} + \text{overlapPenalty} * \text{overlap},$$

where **overlapPenalty** is a parameter, typically ~100.0 in our test; **overlap** is the area of the intersection of all the rectangles. The actual total overlap area is difficult to calculate (involving calculating the overlapping regions of a set of polygons); we use an approximation that achieves the desired effect:

```

overlap = 0;
for (i=0; i<nrects-1; ++i)
    for (j=i+1; j<nrects; ++j)
        overlap += CalcIntersection
(&rects[i], &rects[j]);

```

This code segment evaluates overlap as the total sum of the intersection area between all rects. The "CalcIntersection" procedure calculates the intersection area between two rectangles and the code segment loops over this procedure for all rectangles. In the limit where no rectangles overlap, the value of overlap is zero which matches the true total overlap. In the limit where all rectangles overlap, the value of overlap is large. However, since the constraint is to minimize overlap, having a large overlap contribution when all rectangles coincide is OK. In other words, this approximation to the total overlap does the right thing.

[0024] **WhiteSpace** is a measure of the amount of white space left on the page in the given state. **WhiteSpace** is defined by:

$$\text{WhiteSpace} = \text{bboxArea} - \text{blackArea},$$

where **bboxArea** is the total area of the bounding box (the bounding box of all rectangles adjusted to the specified aspect ratio); **blackArea** is the area of the union of all Rectangles. **blackArea** is approximated by:

$$\text{blackArea} = \text{totalRectArea} - \text{overlap},$$

where **totalRectArea** is the sum of the areas of all rectangles.

[0025] In our work an epoch is typically 500 cycles with an initial temperature $T_0 = 100.0$, and ending temperature $T_{\text{end}} = 0.01$, and fractional temperature change of 0.975. The simulated annealing process requires an initial configuration of the rectangles. In all of our examples, the initial configuration is such that the upper left hand corner of all rectangles is at coordinate (0,0).

[0026] Figure 1 is an example of the resulting rectangle layout based on an aspect ratio of 1.29. There are 20 original rectangles with dimensions randomly distributed between 20 and 50. The percentage of white space on this "page" is 18%.

[0027] In Figure 2, the same data was processed but without the constraint of maintaining the aspect ratio. The percentage white space is 13.2%.

[0028] In Figure 3 an additional constraint was specified such that a penalty was added to the energy function for rectangles positioned near the center of the page. This additional constraint has the effect of open-

ing the middle of the page and driving rectangles toward the outside edge. The aspect ratio constraint is included here. Percentage white space is 23%.

[0029] In Figure 4, the opposite penalty is set, i.e., rectangles were penalized for being toward the edge. The effect is to position rectangles closer to the center. The aspect ratio is not constrained. The percentage white space is 28%.

[0030] It is possible to add additional constraints to the energy function. Some constraints may be applied for artistic purposes; for example, the results shown in Fig. 4. It may be desirable to have the rectangles aligned in rows or columns. This is a topic for continued research. Also, the proper normalization of the energy function to simplify the determination of constants such as **overlapPenalty** will be studied.

[0031] Figure 5 illustrates a typical system 1 that would implement the above-described process. Within the computer system 2 a microprocessor 3 executes the formatting algorithm which is stored in memory 4. A scanner 5 is used to capture several images, either all at once from a single platen or individually. The digital images are then automatically organized by the microprocessor 2 with the inventive process recalled from memory 4 by the microprocessor, and the result is a contact sheet-like representation of the images which may also be stored in memory 4, or rendered by a printer 6.

[0032] While the invention is described with reference to a particular embodiment, this particular embodiment is intended to be illustrative, not limiting. Various modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the amended claims. Modifications and alterations will occur to others upon reading and understanding this specification; therefore, it is intended that all such modifications and alterations are included insofar as they come within the scope of the appended claims or equivalents thereof.

40 Claims

1. A microprocessor implemented method for automatically defining how a plurality of digital images should be arranged on a page comprising the application of optimization techniques which evaluate and format said plurality of digital images on contact sheet-like templates whereon each image is automatically scaled and positioned to minimize the amount of white space on the page thereby producing an arrangement of said plurality of images that are as large as possible, yet fit within a pre-designated page area.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein optimization is determined under the following constraints:

a) rectangles representing each of said images do not overlap,

b) a bounding box for said rectangles has a minimum area, and
 c) the aspect ratio of the bounding box is a fixed value.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein said bounding box has minimum white space and is then formed for placement of said images represented by said rectangles and the aspect ratio of the print area of the paper is determined whereby said images can be scaled by the appropriate amount to make the bounding box the same size as the printable area of said page.

4. A microprocessor implemented method for automatically generating the digital equivalent of a photographers *contact* print sheet onto which a plurality of segmented images will be scaled and distributed such that each of said images on a resulting page representing said contact print sheet is scaled as large as possible and wherein there is a minimum of white space remaining on the rendered page, wherein said images are scaled by the same amount, i.e., the relative size of each segmented image stays the same and an optimum spatial distribution of the images, represented by rectangles, is determined under the following constraints:

a) rectangles representing each of said images do not overlap,
 b) a bounding box for said rectangles has a minimum area, and
 c) the aspect ratio of the bounding box is a fixed value.

5. The method of claim 4 wherein said bounding box has minimum white space and is then formed for placement of said images represented by said rectangles and the aspect ratio of the print area of the paper is determined whereby said images can be scaled by the appropriate amount to make the bounding box the same size as the printable area of said page.

6. A image layout processing device comprising:

a microprocessor programmed to execute an image layout template algorithm consisting of rules for producing a layout of a plurality of digital images in a logical structure wherein each image is scaled and positioned to minimize white space by uniformly enlarging images to fit within said logical structure; and
 a memory for retaining said image layout template algorithm.

7. The document processing device of claim 6, further comprising:

a means for gang scanning a plurality of images into said system; and
 a means for rendering said layout.

8. The invention of claim 6 wherein said microprocessor automatically generates templates which define how different images should be arranged on a page through the application of standard optimization techniques having cost functions tuned to the needs of SmartPlaten technology.

9. The invention of claim 7 wherein a collection of digital images are arranged on a page representing a contact sheet-like templates whereon each image is scaled and positioned to minimize the amount of white space on said page and wherein resulting images are as large as possible, yet fit within a pre-designated area of said page.

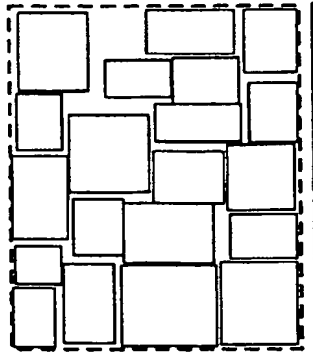


FIG. 1

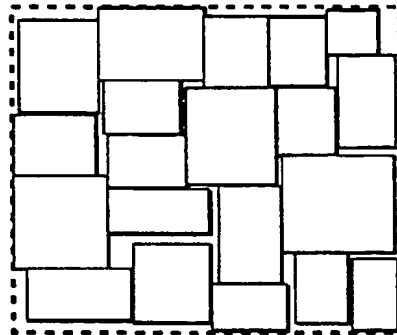


FIG. 2

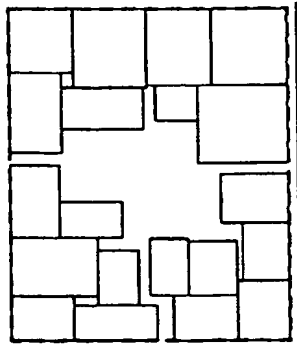


FIG. 3

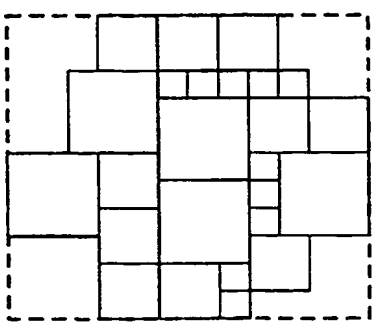


FIG. 4

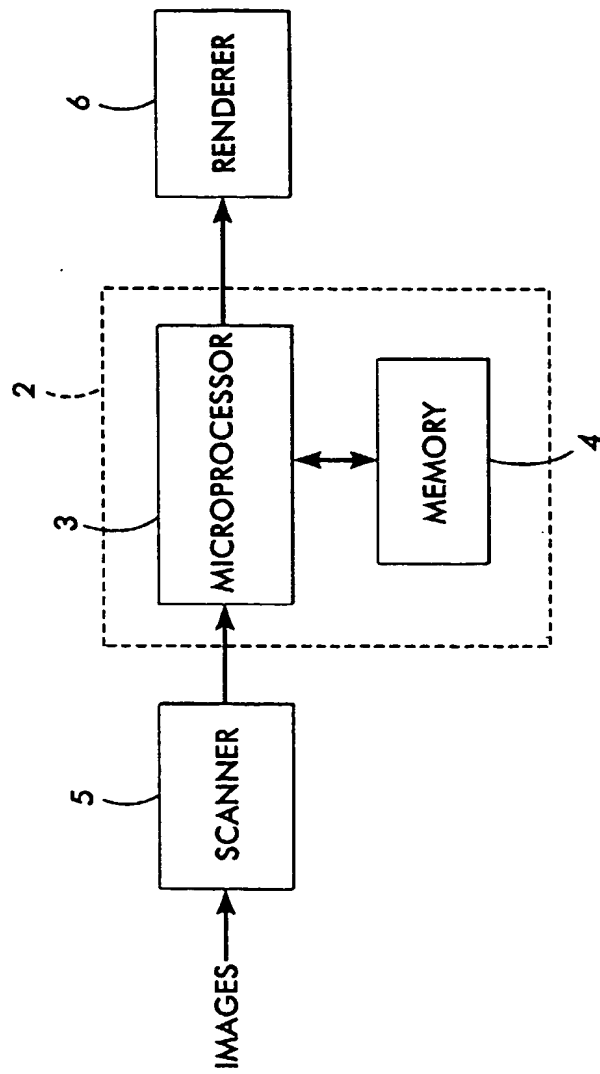


FIG. 5



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(30) Priority: **08.01.1998 US 4286**

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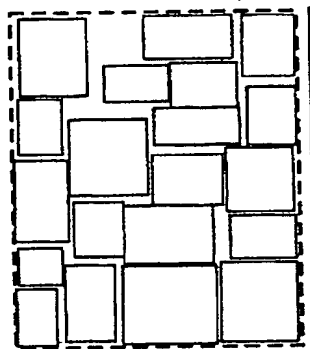


FIG. 1



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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 99 10 0211

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02-07-2002

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